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MOTHER'S PLACE

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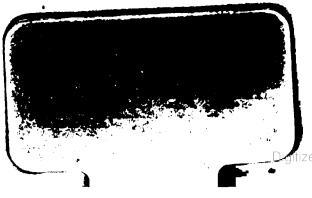

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"Rose sat down in her Mother's Chair, and folded her hands thoughtfully."

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MOTHER'S PLACE.

BY

MINA E. GOULDING.

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MOTHER'S PLACE.

CHAPTER I.

THE TELEGRAM.

"ROSE, dear, how would you like to be housekeeper for three or four days?"

Rose Ellis laid down her satchel and looked inquiringly into her mother's face.

"What *do* you mean, mother?" she asked.

"I've had a telegram from Liverpool telling me that Aunt Margaret is very much worse, and asking me to go and see her. Could you spare me, do you think?"

Rose was silent for a minute; then a very womanly expression stole over her face, and she answered gravely:

"I think we'll be obliged to spare you, whether we can or no, if poor auntie is so ill."

"Well, I think so too, dear. But where is Willie? I want him to run up to father's office and tell him."

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"I think he'll be in soon. He came out of school about five minutes before me. Shall *I* go and tell father?"

"No, I want you to help me at home. If I go at all I shall leave by the seven o'clock train."

"Going to-night, mother! Why don't you wait till to-morrow?"

"Because I'm afraid your auntie might not be alive then, and I want very much to speak to her once more. You know she is my only sister, and it makes me sad to think of her being so ill."

Rose's heart was touched. The tears were standing in her mother's eyes, and she was looking very pale and anxious.

She wanted very much to say something to comfort her; but, as very often happens with older and wiser people than Rose, the right words seemed to have hidden themselves and she could not find them anywhere. However, she made up for the loss of words by putting her arms round her mother's neck, and kissing her twice.

Just then Willie came into the passage, whistling as merrily as a lark. He was not a little surprised to see his mother and Rose looking as if something very dreadful had happened.

"What's up, mother?" he asked in school-boy fashion, as he suddenly ceased whistling.

Mrs. Ellis and Rose made matters plain to him, and in

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a very few minutes he had started off with the telegram and a message for his father.

Mrs. Ellis then hurried away to pack up the few things she would require; and Rose, thoughtful, loving little Rose, set on the kettle and prepared the tea.

"Shall I help you pack, mother?" she inquired, as soon as the meal was ready.

"No, dear, I haven't much packing to do. I shan't be away for many days. But come here to me for a minute while the house is quiet."

Rose obeyed; and Mrs. Ellis, sitting down on a low rocking-chair, put her arm round her little daughter's waist.

"You will do your best to fill mother's place, Rosie? You'll keep the house bright and tidy, and try to cook father's food nicely."

"Yes, mother, I'll try to keep things right."

"There's something else I want to say. I'm troubled about father. The house will seem lonesome to him without me; but you'll be gentle and good-tempered and try to take care of him? Keep him at home of an evening if you can possibly do so, Rose."

As her mother spoke several gloomy fears came stealing over Rose's mind. What if father wouldn't stay at home however much she tried to keep him? What if he went to the "Golden Lion" and came home ——. The next

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word she didn't like to say even to herself; perhaps my little readers can supply it.

Poor little Rose! She had good reasons for remembering the last time that her father had spent an evening at the "Golden Lion."

It was no easy task for her to force back all these sad thoughts and say, "I'll try to take care of him and keep him at home."

"There's one thing more, Rose. It is about Willie. You are two years older than he, you know, and I can talk to you and trust you as though you were a woman. If father should be wanting to send to the public-house for anything, I would rather you should go than Willie. I hate the place myself, and I want you to begin now and help me to teach Willie to keep away from it. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, mother dear, quite," replied Rose; and it seemed that from that moment a new responsibility rested on her childish shoulders.

"Now run away down-stairs, and see if father has turned the corner of the street yet."

As the child's light footsteps fell on the stairs Mrs. Ellis heaved a deep sigh, and drew her hand wearily across her brow, murmuring, "Dear little Rose. She is so young! So young to have to help bear her mother's burdens!"

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Before ten minutes had passed away Willie had returned bringing his father with him.

I am sure that some of my readers will have been wondering what Mr. Ellis was like.

I have mentioned him in connection with the "Golden Lion," and it is quite possible that some boys and girls may have pictured him as one of those shaky-limbed, red-nosed individuals, whom we have all seen at different times hanging round the public-house door.

If you had seen Mr. Ellis as he walked up the street towards his home, with Willie at his side, I am sure you would never have associated him with the "Golden Lion."

He was fully six feet in height and was very strongly built. His face was pleasant, and his appearance highly respectable.

I do not want you to run away with the idea that he was an unkind husband and father.

I do not think there was a man in the town who loved his wife and children more than Mr. Ellis did. But there was just one thing to be said against him. He had a weakness for intoxicating drink, and, instead of battling against this weakness and keeping away from the drink, he indulged himself, and let his enemy get the master of him.

And so it happened that every now and then he would allow himself to be drawn into evil, and would spend an evening in the public-house and go home drunk. Of course

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he would be very much ashamed of himself in the morning; but even then he would go back again to his old enemy, and drink to drown his sense of shame.

This state of affairs would last for about two days, and then he would sober down again and go back to his work.

Five or six years before the commencement of this story Mr. Ellis had lost three hundred pounds through the failure of a bank. The loss of this money had weighed heavily on his mind, and his friends said that he had taken to drink to drown his trouble.

But the drink did *not* get rid of his trouble. It sprang up afresh directly he grew sober, and teased him more vigorously than ever.

Seeing, then, that he had tried nearly a hundred times, and had spent nearly a hundred pounds in trying to drown it, and had entirely failed, don't you think it was time he gave up his fruitless efforts?

But to return to my story! The remembrance of the loss of the three hundred pounds was not continually presenting itself to Mr. Ellis' mind. I have said before that it was busiest after he had spent a couple of days in the public-house.

Nearly a fortnight had passed since he last crossed the threshold of one of those places; and, as he opened the door of his house and stood at the foot of the stairs waiting for his wife, whom he heard hurrying out of the bed-room

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above, he looked the very picture of an honest kind-hearted man.

"You think I ought to go, George?" asked Mrs. Ellis, before he had time to speak.

"Yes, yes. Go by all means. I wouldn't have poor Maggie die without seeing you."

"That's just how I feel," replied Mrs. Ellis, "only I'm troubled about leaving the children and you."

"Nonsense! our Rose will make a first-rate housekeeper."

"She'll do her best, poor child,—but—"

The tears suddenly dimmed the woman's bright eyes. She laid one hand on each of her husband's shoulders, and, standing on tip-toe, whispered something in his ear.

I think you can guess what the whisper was about. For a moment a shade of annoyance flitted over his face. Then it passed away altogether, and, bending down, he kissed his little wife and patted her on the cheek, almost as though she were his daughter instead of being the mother of his children.

He seemed to make light of her fears and bade her forget them.

Then they went together into the kitchen where Willie and Rose were kneeling, busily toasting bread before the clear fire.

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CHAPTER II.

ROSE'S HOUSEKEEPING.

MOTHER had started on her journey. Willie and his father had walked with her to the station, while Rose had stood on the door-step watching them until they turned the corner of the street and disappeared. The blinding tears filled her eyes as she went back into the house and shut the door.

The old-fashioned clock in the kitchen seemed to be ticking much louder than usual, and the place was strangely quiet.

Rose sat down in her mother's chair and folded her little hands thoughtfully.

"I musn't forget anything," she said to herself. "I've got to fill mother's place,—to do the housework, cook the food, take care of Willie, and most of all to look after father and try to keep him at home of an evening."

As she counted up the duties so unexpectedly laid upon her she brushed away her tears in as womanly a manner

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as she could command. Then she tied on a clean print apron, and set to work to clear away the tea things, sweep the hearth, and make the place cozy and bright before her father's return.

The evening passed away very pleasantly. Father sat by the fireside telling funny stories of the time when he was a boy and ran away from home to be a sailor. How he was on the sea for several months until the ship put in at a foreign port, how he came back to England heartily tired of a sailor's life, and walked about eighty miles to his old home! Rose sat knitting, and Willie was busy with a knife and some wood trying to form a boat; but every now and then the stocking would fall from the little hands, and Will's knife would be idle as the children stopped to laugh at what was comical or cry at what was sad in their father's tales.

Rose went to bed with a good heart. It would not be so very hard to fill mother's place after all, she thought. Father had been so loving and good that night. He had spent all his time in amusing Willie and her. Would he not do so every evening until mother came back?

Mother had said that she would not stay longer than a week at the very outside; and one evening out of the seven was already got over.

The next day was Friday. She rose early, and, that being the day appointed by her mother for the weekly

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thorough cleaning of the kitchen and pantry, she determined that she would work with a will and try to get done early.

She polished the grate until she could see her face in it, whitened the hearth and scrubbed the floor with wonderful energy.

When at last the day's work was done, she looked round with a glow of triumph on her face, and thought how pleased mother would be if she only knew how nicely the kitchen had been cleaned.

The old-fashioned clock was striking twelve. A very peculiar old clock it was. It seemed to be very reluctant to let people know how quickly its hands moved. It would stop to gasp for breath between every stroke, and the gasping took up such a long time that to hear it strike *twelve* was most tedious.

But Rose had no time to think of the clock to-day. The beef was baking in the oven; the potatoes were boiling briskly; the clean white cloth was laid out neatly with knives, forks, spoons, and glasses all shining their best; and the little housekeeper was giving the meat a final turn before hastening to change her old dress and make herself neat and tidy like mother would have done had she been there.

Just as she gave a finishing touch to her brown curls she heard a hissing noise in the kitchen below, and a stifling smell of damp ashes came floating up-stairs.

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All the glow of pleasure died out of her cheeks, and a look of blank dismay took up its place as she stood the next minute on the threshold of the kitchen.

The saucepan had tumbled aside; the water had half extinguished the fire and wrought sad mischief on the white hearth; moreover the ashes were flying all over the room and then settling down on chairs, tables, plates, glasses and everything else.

Poor little Rose! Can you wonder that the tears stood in her eyes?

I have no doubt but she could have cried until half-past twelve quite easily; but she suddenly bethought herself that crying wouldn't mend matters, and, hastily drying her eyes, she set to work, first to brighten the fire, then to put some more hot water to the potatoes, then to brush the grate and clean the hearth over again, and after that to dust the room.

I am sure you will all join me in saying, "Well done, Rose!" And don't you think it would be a good thing if boys and girls, and grown up people too, would follow the example of our little housekeeper? If, when we are overtaken by accident or misfortune, we would spend our time in trying to smooth and straighten matters, instead of vainly fretting over our troubles, we should both add to our own happiness and to that of those around us.

Before her father came in at half-past twelve all traces

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of disorder had vanished from the room, and Rose's face was as bright as possible.

When the day's work was done and they were sitting round the fire, exactly as they had done on the previous evening, Willie begged his father to go on telling them stories.

Mr. Ellis rubbed his hands and laughed.

"Do you think my head is a story-book?" he inquired good-humouredly. "I thought you would have had enough last night to last for a week at any rate."

"We didn't, though," replied Willie with a shake of his head.

"I had some thoughts of going out for a couple of hours; but I don't know that I shan't be as comfortable here. Bring my slippers here, little housekeeper, and I'll settle down for the evening. Then one of you go to the 'Golden Lion' and get a pint of best ale for my supper."

"I'll go, father," said Willie, throwing down his knife. In a moment Rose remembered her mother's words. "If father should be wanting to send to the public-house for anything, I would rather you should go than Willie."

"Let *me* go; there's a good boy," she pleaded earnestly. "I haven't been out all day, and a run will do me good."

"Is it such a treat for you to get my ale, then?" laughed her father, as he gave her the threepence. "We must let Rose get it, Willie."

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"All right," was the short response; and Willie began to apply himself afresh to his boat.

Rose soon reached the "Golden Lion." For a moment she halted on the door-step, not liking to go in; then, summoning all her courage, she made her way to the bar.

"What's for you?" asked the landlord of a child who had elbowed her way before Rose to the bar.

"Is our Tom here?" inquired the child, in a shrill voice. "We can't find him nowheres."

"Bless the child! How should I know anything about your Tom? Move aside, quick."

"What can I get for you, ma'am?" and the landlord turned his attention to the next customer.

The woman addressed asked for half a pint of whisky, and drew a black bottle from under her shawl.

Something in the appearance of this woman attracted Rose's attention. She was very tall and thin; the hands which clutched the bottle were brown and bony, and the eyes which gloated on it looked dark and bright. Rose thought they were like two live coals.

Then came Rose's turn, and when the ale had been brought to her she turned quickly away.

Then once again she heard the distressed child inquiring for "Tom," and her loving little heart bled as the landlord again ordered the girl to "move aside, quick."

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Acting on a sudden impulse, Rose waited for a minute until the child should come outside.

"Have you lost him for long?" she asked compassionately, as the little one crept out sobbing violently.

"We ain't seen him all the evenin', an' mother's afeard he'll get into a row wi' his master for not finishin' his work. Then he'd get the sack and we should starve."

Rose did not understand that getting "the sack" meant being dismissed by his master; but she felt very sorry for the little girl, and comforted her as well as she could.

"There, don't cry any more now," she said in her kindest voice. "You'll find him before long. I'd go to the 'Wheat-sheaf' if I were you. He's very likely there."

The child started off on her weary search and Rose turned towards home, wondering how she would feel if Willie were lost and she were seeking him. Just at that moment she became conscious of the scrutiny of the sharp black eyes which had attracted her attention at the bar.

She looked up, half-frightened, and saw the woman leaning against a lamp-post and viewing her intently.

As the woman caught Rose's eye she advanced a few steps and laid one of her bony brown hands on her shoulder. "You be George Ellis' little lass, eh?" she inquired in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes," replied Rose faintly, for she did not like to have those wild, piercing eyes looking into her face.

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"You've no call to be afeard on me, lass. I won't hurt ye; not one hair o' your head would I hurt. I knew your mother years afore you was born. She was kind to me then, she was."

Something like a sob choked the hoarse voice, and Rose looked up surprised.

"I'm a wicked woman now," she went on. "I've sold myself for drink—body and soul for drink, lass, and I can't recall it now. Tell your mother that Sarah Brown has been talkin' to you, and that she remembers how good and kind she was once."

Rose nodded her head and endeavoured to pass on, but the hand detained her.

"Don't come here no more, lass. 'Taint a fit place for Kate's child. If I was seein' my time over again I'd never enter a public—no *never;* but now it's all for whisky, everything must go for whisky. Now go! And don't come to the public never no more. 'Taint a fit place for Kate's child."

As she finished speaking she removed her hand and Rose slipped away, trembling from head to foot. The strange manner of the woman had filled her with fear. Not until she reached the corner of the street did she venture to look round, and then she caught sight of the bony hands as they turned the black bottle round and round and then lifted it to her mouth.

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"What a dreadful, dreadful woman," thought Rose.

"She calls me Kate's child, and says my mother used to be kind to her before I was born. She must have been a better woman then."

"Who's Sarah Brown?" was her first question as she set down the ale. "Do you know her, father?"

"I used to know her," he replied carelessly; "but what of her?"

Rose told of all that had happened, dwelling especially on the remark the woman had made relative to Mrs. Ellis' past kindness.

"Sarah Brown is a drunken woman, Rose. Not at all fit to speak to you," he replied slowly. "She used to be servant to your grandmother, when your mother was only a little girl. That's how she comes to know her."

It was evident that her father intended to say no more on the subject.

But Rose was far from satisfied. Again and again she seemed to feel Sarah Brown's hand resting on her shoulder, and to hear her say, "I've sold myself for drink—body and soul for drink, lass, and I can't recall it now."

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CHAPTER III.

A GLOOMY EVENING

THE days passed slowly by. Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday had come and gone.

Rose had filled her mother's place as well as she possibly could, and when she laid her tired little body down to rest on the Tuesday night she consoled herself by murmuring, "I've done the housework, cooked the food, took care of Willie as well as I could; and father's never been out of an evening yet."

These thoughts were still in her mind when she fell asleep.

I wish you could have seen her as she lay sleeping that night. The soft, bright rays of the full moon stole in between the half-drawn curtains and fell peacefully, almost lovingly, upon the sweet little face and the brown curls which rested on the pillow.

She must have been enjoying pleasant dreams, for every now and then her rosy lips parted with a smile and she looked so happy.

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After a while the appearance of the sky was changed. Dark clouds rose in the north, and gradually spread over the broad expanse of blue, hiding the face of the beautiful moon.

Then the wind, which had been rising for several hours, sobbed and moaned around the house, as though it were bringing news of some coming trouble.

Dear little Rose! It was well that she dreamed on in peace and did not hear it. It was well that she did not know of the dark, dark cloud which was rising in her life-sky.

The storm passed away, and presently the day dawned clear and bright.

When the clocks were striking seven Rose rubbed her eyes, and after a minute's consideration jumped out of bed.

After she had dressed herself she knelt down to pray, and then rising from her knees began to her work in good earnest.

"Is it a good dinner, father?" she asked cheerfully, as she put a beef-steak pudding on the table at half-past twelve o'clock.

"If the taste is as good as the smell I must answer yes," replied Mr. Ellis.

"Because, you know, it's the very first pudding I ever made; but then I've seen mother make them lots of times."

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"That's the way to get on, Rose. Watch your mother, follow her example, and you'll make a good housekeeper. Indeed I think you're one already."

This praise, coming as it did from father's lips, made Rose's heart dance with joy, and kept her glad all the afternoon.

Then how carefully she set out the tea things when the time drew near at which she expected her father! How cautious she was lest the toast should be burnt or anything else reflect badly on her credit as "a good housekeeper!"

Willie was home from school. He sat on a footstool in the corner, preparing his home lessons, only looking up now and then as though he would not be sorry when father came home and tea was begun.

"Father's late, isn't he Rose?" he exclaimed at length. "I can't get that sum right anyhow. It must go till after tea. Aren't you hungry?"

"Not very. Wouldn't it be nicer to wait till father comes? Here look! You shall have some bread and butter just now, and then I'll help you with your sum."

Willie agreed, especially to the bread and butter proposition.

The sum was finished, the geography learned, and still father did not come.

Rose began to feel anxious. Once or twice she went

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to the door and looked up the street, but each time returned without having seen him.

It was more than an hour past his usual time when she called Willie's attention from the book which he had taken up.

"Willie! Where's father? It's seven o'clock and past. I think one of us should go to see if he has left the office."

"That would be best," said Willie, closing his book.

"Will you go, or shall I?"

"I'll go," and Willie took his cap from the peg.

"Come straight back, dear, if father is not in the office."

"All right, Rosy posy," said Willie. "See now if I don't be back in twenty minutes."

How long those twenty minutes seemed to Rose!

The old clock ticked away apparently louder than usual. Even the tortoise-shell cat seemed discontented and impatient, for she walked about the kitchen, now looking into the fire, now resting a moment under the table, now leaping into Mr. Ellis' chair, and lastly rolling over and over underneath the sofa.

"Father isn't at the office, Rosie," exclaimed Willie as soon as he entered the house.

Rose's heart sank at the words, and a little sigh found its way from her heart.

"What shall we do, Willie?"

The boy shook his head.

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"Come and get your tea, dear."

"You'll have yours too, Rose? You haven't eaten anything."

"No, I don't care for any. I don't feel that I can eat without father's being here."

She took her seat at the tray and filled Willie's cup. The little fellow ate and drank with a sober face.

"Rose," he said presently, when she had taken away his cup and saucer and left the table ready for her father, "are you afraid?"

"Afraid of what, dear?"

"Of being in the house after dark."

"Oh! no. 'Tisn't that. I'm not a bit afraid of the dark."

"Is it mother's being away that makes you sorry?"

"Not exactly. Yet I wish she were here."

"Where is father, do you think?"

It was too much for little Rose. A great lump came into her throat and she could not speak.

She only passed her hand through Willie's fair wavy hair, as though she were his mother instead of his sister, and kissed him quietly.

"Is he getting drunk, Rosie, like he did at Christmas?"

"I hope not," was the sad reply.

Then Willie looked up into her face and saw that it was wet with tears.

How quiet it was in the room! The old clock went on

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with its "tick, tick, tick, tick," and nothing else was heard. Presently it grew dark. Rose wiped her eyes, lit the lamp, set the kettle where it would keep boiling, and then said quietly:

"I'm going to find father."

"I'll come too," said Willie.

"No, dear! I want you to stay here."

"But I don't like to be here all alone."

"Well, will you wait under the lamp-post at the corner of the street, if I take you that far?"

"Yes. I shan't be afraid there."

"And you're sure you won't go away until I come back?"

Willie promised, and then they started out together, Willie holding her hand as though he were frightened.

"Are you going into the public-house, Rose?" he inquired.

"I'm going to find out where father is, and get him to come home if I can. Now, you stay just here, in the lamp-light, and I'll come back for you as soon as I can."

She left Willie and hastened towards the "Golden Lion," which was about two hundred yards beyond the corner of the street.

There were a few idle men and boys hanging round the doors of the public-house.

Rose looked swiftly round amongst them to assure herself that her father was not there.

Just as she was about to cross the threshold of the

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"Golden Lion," a dirty rude-looking boy put out his foot to make her fall.

She stumbled over it, and would have struck her head against the door-post had not some one who had been watching her darted across the pavement and caught her by the arm. Looking up, she caught the gleam of Sarah Brown's eyes.

"Take that for yer impudence," Sarah exclaimed angrily, turning suddenly upon the boy who had put out his foot, and giving him a sharp box on the ear which sent him howling down the street. Then turning again to Rose she whispered in an altered voice, "What brings you here? 'Taint a fit place for you."

"Let me go, please," said Rose gently. "I must go inside."

"Is it your father you're seeking?"

Rose nodded her head sorrowfully.

The harsh features of the woman's face softened, and something akin to pity shone out from the black eyes.

"He's in there, child. Go and speak to him. Nobody shall harm you."

Sarah murmured something about her being "Kate's child," and followed her, pointing out the way to the public room.

For a minute after entering it Rose looked round on the many strange faces in a bewildered manner.

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Then some one began to sing. Oh, how the voice struck her little heart! It was her father's voice!

He sat with his back to her, and she never moved until the song was ended. Then when all in the room were clapping their hands and shouting, she stole timidly forward and took her father by the hand.

"Come home, father," she pleaded.

A score of eyes were instantly turned upon her; but she heeded them not.

All that she knew was that her father was there, and that he must be got away if possible.

He rose from his seat as though he would have listened to her pleading, but in a moment a companion's hand detained him.

"Pack o' nonsense, George. We ain't goin' to let you off yet. 'Tis seldom as you comes in now, and when we do get you we'll keep you."

"Ay, ay! Hold him fast," shouted another voice.

"Go home, bairn, and don't be coming here disturbing your father," put in a third.

"Father, dear dear father, come home with me," pleaded little Rose once more.

She hid her face on his neck and clung to him.

"Well, well, if that ain't the best bit I've seen this long time," laughed the man who had put his hand on her father's shoulder and pushed him back in his seat.

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"COME HOME, FATHER, SHE PLEADED."

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"George Ellis agoin' to be spoonied in that there fashion."

Mr. Ellis disengaged Rose gently. He looked into her pitiful face and again moved as though he would have followed her; then he looked round on his companions, and, catching the sneers on their faces, his courage failed him, and Rose, pitiful, pleading, Rose was put aside.

"I'll come soon. You go home and take care of Willie," he said.

She looked round the room despairingly. Was there no one who would help her?

No! Not one.

Slowly and sorrowfully she turned her back on them all and made her way into the passage.

"Won't he come?" asked Sarah, who was waiting for her. "Won't he come?" she repeated excitedly, as Rose only sobbed in reply. "Oh, he's got a dark, black heart if he can put aside the likes o' you!"

"Let me go, please, Sarah. Willie's waiting at the corner." Without a word Sarah took the child's hand and led her along the crowded passage and into the street.

"Where's your mother?" she inquired suddenly, as soon as Willie came forward from his place of waiting. "How is it you're out in the streets?"

"Mother's gone to see Aunt Maggie," explained Rose. "Auntie's dying, they think."

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"Dying,—dying," repeated Sarah in a strange voice. "Them as I nursed when they was only children, a-dying. Them as is good a-dying, and I left alive—I who am so wicked and miserable."

She was evidently talking to herself, but Rose and Willie heard every word.

By this time they had reached their home. Sarah made no attempt to leave them. Rose was afraid that she would open the door and walk in, but she stopped suddenly and sat down on the step.

"Don't be afeard on me, child. I won't hurt Kate's bairn—no, not a hair o' her head, as I told you before. I won't come into the house. I ain't fit to enter her house; but go you in and get a shawl or something to wrap round you and this boy, then come back and I'll talk to you."

Rose felt that she dared not disobey. Besides this, the house seemed so quiet and dismal that she was almost glad to get back to Sarah, although she was so strange.

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CHAPTER IV.

SARAH'S STORY AND FATHER'S HOME-COME.

THE street was very quiet, and the occasional passers-by took little notice of the three as they sat close together on the step.

"I said I'd talk to you," began Sarah, as soon as they were comfortable, "and so I will."

"You think I'm a queer body, don't you?"

Rose did not know how to answer such a pointed question.

"Tell me straight now. You think I'm a queer body, don't you?"

"Yes, rather," replied Rose timidly.

"I knew it; and you were afeard on me at first, wasn't you?"

Rose admitted that she had been.

"Are you afeared now? Tell me that straight."

"No, not at all," was Rose's unhesitating answer.

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A gleam of honest satisfaction overspread the woman's face.

"Well, then, shall I tell you all about myself?"

"Yes, please do," answered Rose, and Willie's face, which had kept very sorrowful, brightened as he echoed, "Please, do." Sarah clasped her bony brown hands together and laid them in her lap, then she began to tell her story.

"I'm a bad woman now. Everything is dark, and 'twon't brighten never no more for Sarah Brown,—never no more.

"When I was a little girl I lived in a village in Cumberland,—a pretty little place it was too.

"When I left school I went to live as servant with your grandmother at Carlisle.

"Your aunt Margaret was seven years old when I went there, and your mother was five.

"I was with 'em a deal, and they got fond o' me. There wasn't apples, nor oranges, nor sweets, nor nothing, but must be shared with Sarah afore they'd touch 'em.

"I was a smart-looking lass then. Very, very different to what I am now. Folks used to say as there wasn't a finer girl in Carlisle!

"They told me this over and over again, till I got vain. Oh, my silly heart! what was I proud on?

"What is it to have a fine-looking face if your heart is all weak and foolish?

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"Well, by-and-by there come along a smartish-looking man and he talked me over.

"'Sarah,' says he, 'I've got a fine business in Manchester, and if you'll marry me I'll take you there and keep you a lady.'

"Your grandmother begged me not to go, but I was self-willed and would not listen to her.

"He smiled so smoothly and talked so fine, saying what he'd do for me, and I was stupid enough to believe him.

"I give your grandmother notice and left her. They all cried that day. She cried and Maggie cried, but your mother cried most of all. I mind well how she put her arms round my neck and kissed me, and cried till my cotton gown was drenched at the shoulder wi' her tears.

"After I married him we went to Manchester, and there I found that the business he had prated about was nothin' but a low public-house affair.

"Then I was miserable. He drank a great deal himself, and I drank. How I fell so low in such a bit of time I don't know; but afore we'd been married twelve months we would both get drunk and fight and quarrel like two wild things.

"He cared nothin' for me, and I got to hate him. The business did not thrive. Everything went wrong. We drank and drank and got into debt, and one night he just

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made off without sayin' a word to anybody. I've never seen him since.

"The things was all sold to pay our debts, and I was turned out into the world to make my own way again, with a sickly baby only a month old.

"Oh, I was so miserable! I had got to love the drink, and so long as I could find money for it I would buy it. I knew I was getting wickeder and wickeder, and yet I didn't seem to care.

"The baby pined away and died at six months. When she died I hadn't prayed for many a weary day; but as I saw her pretty, pinched face a-lyin' cold and dead I thought my heart 'ud burst, and I knelt down and thanked God that He had took her away from such a wicked wretch as I was.

"You are crying, bairn,—don't 'ee cry. It cuts my heart up so, and minds me o' the day when your mother cried on my shoulder,—don't 'ee cry.—

"I was bad after that. I fought in the street one night, and knocked down a woman who had been quarrelling with me. Her head was bruised and cut, and one of her bones broke with the fall.

"Then I got took to prison. I was to be there for three months.

"How your mother found me out I don't know. I've passed quick over the time between my baby dying and

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my going to prison, but there was six or seven years between. I ain't good at reckoning; but anyhow she was just going to be married to your father. She found me out, as I said before, and come to me in prison.

"She talked to me. She begged and prayed me to give up my bad ways and lead a new life.

"She seemed to love me then, and, though I had got so low, she didn't fear to put her hands on my shoulder and kiss me.

"Now *I* am crying. Oh, to think that a tear should come into Sarah Brown's eye! But it cuts me up to think on't. She *kissed* me, and then she knelt down on the prison floor and prayed.

"I don't forget it. I can't. God knows that if I dared pray one prayer more it should be for her.

"She knelt down there like an angel o' light and begged for forgiveness for me. There weren't no pretence about her feelin'. It came straight from her loving heart, and I know it went straight to God. It spoke good for her, but not for me. What could change me? Oh, I am bad, bad, *bad!* I went out of prison, and since then I've kept pretty much out o' quarrels and such like; but every year sees my heart get blacker, and every year I wish I could die. And yet I'm afeard o' dying—too bad to live; too bad to die.

"There, there! Am I frightening you again? Don't look

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like that. I'll do anything I can for Kate's bairns. God bless her, God bless you both."

Then she ceased speaking. She hid her wild-looking eyes behind her hands and sobbed aloud.

For a minute Rose looked at her, wondering what she could say.

Then stroking her brown hands gently, she whispered,

"Poor Sarah! Don't cry. Jesus will forgive you and help you to be good, if you'll only ask Him."

"Forgive ME! Oh no, no. I'm too black."

"No, you're not, Sarah. Mother often says how Jesus likes to get hold of the blackest hearts and make them white and clean. Give up drinking, Sarah. Oh, please, please do. Jesus will help you."

The woman arose, and shook her head sorrowfully.

"I can't now," she replied. "Oh, I love the drink. I must have it. It's my only comfort."

Then with a resolute hand she wiped away her tears, and stood looking on the two children.

"I'm going now," she said. "You two go in and get to bed. I'll watch about the street till your father comes in. Don't be afeard. He shan't see me near the house, but I'll take care o' you for Kate's sake."

She took their two hands and kissed them; but Rose lifted up her face to kiss her.

She scarcely knew why she did so. Sarah Brown bent

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an instant over the child and kissed her, then hurried away. As she wandered up and down the street a few minutes after, she might have been heard repeating in a low voice—

"She kissed me. Kate's child kissed me. I must not drink to-night."—

Presently she wandered to the public-house door, put her hand into her pocket and drew out threepence.

She looked at the money, and seemed as if going in, when suddenly the words rose again to her lips,—"She kissed me,—I must not drink to-night."

Oh, Rose! The holy angels smiled upon you when you kissed that wretched woman. Jesus Himself smiled upon you, and Jesus knew how deep that kiss would sink into the sin-stained heart, how it would whisper softly and sweetly of a better land, a beautiful home whose golden gates were not *quite* hopelessly barred against the weary sinner.

"Did you find father?" asked Willie, as soon as they were alone.

Rose nodded her head sorrowfully.

"Was he in the 'Golden Lion,' getting drunk?"

"I'm afraid so, Willie dear. At any rate he was in there."

"What shall we do, Rose? Oh, I'm frightened!"

He clung to her dress, and the tears streamed down his cheeks.

Then Rose's courage returned. She kissed him and

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wiped his eyes, and without a word led him up-stairs into her own bed-room. The moon was shining through the window, just as it had done the night before.

Kneeling down where the rays of light would fall full upon them she whispered softly, "Let's tell Jesus. He will listen."

For a moment Willie hesitated and looked surprised, then with a quick sob he knelt beside her.

One might easily have imagined it to be a woman's voice that pleaded so earnestly,—"Oh! Lord Jesus, we are very sad to-night. Father's at the public-house and we can't get him home. Mother is far away, and we are all alone and don't know what to do. Oh, Jesus, help us and take care of us! Help Willie not to be frightened, and make father come home quiet very soon. Take care of us all night; bless dear mother and forgive poor father. Teach him to hate the drink and to be good. For Thy Name's sake,—Amen."

Was the prayer heard? Oh, yes! Not one word but went straight to the heart of the loving Saviour, who knows all who trust in Him.

Little Rose felt comforted. She coaxed Willie to go to bed, and then sat beside him till he fell asleep.

How still the house was then! She crept down-stairs softly and sat still in the kitchen, listening to the endless "tick, tick" of the old clock

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Presently it began to strike ten. Rose knew what time it was, yet she counted each stroke aloud.

"'Tis turning-out time," she said to herself, "and father 'll be here soon. The 'Golden Lion' shuts at ten."

Then she turned up the lamp and waited breathlessly. More than once she repeated silently the petition that he might "come home quiet,"—and it was heard.

At last he came! Oh, how different he looked from the man who had walked down the street with Willie at his side on the day when the telegram came!

His step was very unsteady, his head was bent low, and he looked most stupid and unmanly.

Rose shrank involuntarily at sight of him, but remembering that she had been charged to fill mother's place she went to meet him.

"Where's Willie?" he asked, looking round.

"Gone to bed, father. Do you want anything to eat?"

"No. You can go to bed."

"I'll take your boots off first."

He looked at her, half vacantly, half sorrowfully, and sat down in his arm-chair.

She removed his boots tenderly; but before she could bid him "good night" the tears choked her voice, and, turning hastily away, she curled herself upon the sofa and sobbed aloud.

Mr. Ellis was stupefied. He looked at her for a few

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minutes as though he were wondering what would be best for him to do, then he seemed to forget all about her, and sat looking into the fire until he fell asleep.

Rose was wearied out. She had been working hard all day. What wonder was it that, before she ceased sobbing, she too had fallen into a deep slumber?

"*One—two—three—.*"

How loud the clock struck! How it made Rose jump up and wonder where she was!

The fire had died out, the lamp was burning low, and father was still sleeping in his chair. The events of the previous evening soon came into her mind, and she determined to try and get her father to bed.

"Father," she said gently, "wake up!"

But he did not move.

"Father, 'tis late. Get up and go to bed!"

He sighed heavily, opened his eyes, and looked at her.

"Go to bed, father dear! The fire's out and 'tis late."

He was sober then! Sober, and sorry too. Rose could see it in his face, but she had not the heart to refer to the previous evening's experiences.

She lit a candle and beckoned him to follow her. He did so, and, having kissed her good night and bidden her go to bed at once, he closed his bed-room door.

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CHAPTER V.

BRIGHT EXPECTATIONS.

WHAT a change seemed to have come over the household the next morning, when a letter, announcing the sudden change for the better in Aunt Maggie, and Mrs. Ellis' intention of returning by the eight o'clock train in the evening, had been read aloud to the two children!

Willie clapped his hands for very joy. Rose cheered herself by thinking how very soon mother would be there to fill her own place, and Mr Ellis, who had looked very gloomy when he came down to breakfast, began to smile.

The dismal sorrow of the previous evening was nearly forgotten.

The little housekeeper bustled about setting everything in order, and humming over her favourite tunes. Willie started off to school whistling, and at twelve o'clock he came back whistling.

The sunlight streamed into the kitchen. The old cat seemed to recover her youthful gaiety, and began to turn round and round as though she were dancing.

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"You dear old thing!" exclaimed Rose, catching her up in her arms, "I do believe you know mother's coming home. But I haven't any time to nurse you, so get down."

"We'll all go to the station, won't we, Rose?" asked Willie.

"Yes, to be sure. I'll get the tea ready before we start, and have the kettle boiling. You must make haste home from school, Willie."

"I do wish eight o'clock had come."

"So do I. But it won't be a very great while."

The afternoon seemed rather long, but Rose was busy. She was so anxious that the place should look bright and cozy when her mother entered it that she scrubbed the kitchen floor, dusted every particle of furniture, rubbed the steel rod on the fender till it shone as bright as steel could shine, and then set to work to polish the knives and forks.

Father came straight home from the office, and after tea he brushed his coat and put on a clean collar, while Rose busied herself with Willie, whom she wished to look as neat and nice as if the queen were coming to see them.

This she told him several times, and Willie laughingly declared that mother was worth more than all the queens in the world put together.

"Worth more to us, you mean," replied Rose. "You know the Queen of England is a dear lady."

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"Well, worth more to us, then," said Willie apologetically.

At half-past seven they all started off together.

After they had waited a quarter of an hour at the station, the Liverpool train came puffing in.

There was a great bustle for a few minutes. Rose, Willie, and Mr. Ellis looked everywhere among the people and in the carriages, but they could not see the face they wanted to find. The whistle blew, the train puffed out of the station, the passengers began to disperse, and still she could not be seen.

Then a sad look came over the children's faces.

They turned homewards grievously disappointed for *mother had not come.*

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CHAPTER VI.

WHERE WAS MOTHER?

AT the same time as the disappointed husband and children were walking home, Mrs. Ellis was lying pale, and almost unconscious, on a bed in one of the Liverpool hospitals.

Two or three medical men were standing a short distance off and talking gravely to each other.

You will all be wondering what accident had befallen her.

A few hours before, her brother-in-law, who lived in the suburbs of Liverpool, had been driving her to the station, when the horse took fright and dashed down the street at an awful speed. Before it could be checked the vehicle had been brought into violent contact with one which was coming from the opposite direction. Both Mrs. Ellis and her brother-in-law were thrown out. He escaped with a few bruises, but it was soon discovered that Mrs. Ellis was badly hurt. She was quickly removed to the hospital, which was, fortunately, close at hand, and there her leg was found to be fractured.

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As soon as she returned to consciousness she entreated that a message should at once be sent to her husband to let him know where she was.

When Rose caught sight of the telegram her heart sank within her, and something seemed to whisper that her mother was dead.

Quick as lightning fifty dismal thoughts rushed through her mind, and when her father put the telegram into her hand for her to read it she trembled all over.

Having anticipated the worst, the news that her mother was not dead seemed to roll a great burden off her mind.

"She'll get well again, father?" was her first question.

"Yes, child. Please God, 'twon't cost her her life."

"Will it be long before she can come home?"

"I can't tell. It all depends upon how things go. Don't ask questions now, child. I can't talk."

Then he paced up and down the room, looking very much disturbed.

Rose did not speak again, but, beckoning to Willie to follow her, went out of the room.

There was an old book of medicine on one of the shelves in a closet up-stairs, and to this she applied for the exact meaning of the word "fracture," for Rose had an inquiring mind, and did not like to be in doubt as to the real nature of her mother's accident.

When, however, she began to read about "simple

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fracture, compound fractures, comminuted fracture, and compound comminuted fractures," she felt sadly bewildered, and put away the book feeling very little wiser for her pains.

"Is it a very bad thing?" asked Willie, who had been looking silently on while she was reading.

"Yes, it must be very bad," she replied disconsolately. "I can't understand it at all though."

Then the question, which had so often risen to their lips on the gloomy evening which was past, came again, and in one breath they both asked "What shall we do?"

There was no one to answer. Only the twinkling stars shone through the bed-room window and seemed to Rose to be telling of a great, loving Father who would not forget them now.

"Willie," she said suddenly, "we'll have to pray about it. I prayed the other night that father might come home quiet, and he did. I'm sure God heard me,—sure and certain. Now we'll pray for mother, and he'll hear us again."

Willie looked dubious and held back.

"Don't you believe He will?" she inquired anxiously.

"I'm not so sure about it. Was God good to let mother get hurt?"

"Hush, Willie! Mother says we must not try to judge the Great God with our little minds. She says He can see a long long way off in our lives, and when He sends dark

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sorrows to us we are to trust Him all the more, and feel quite sure that He will bring us through and make them do us good."

"What good can this do?" said Willie, still doubtful.

"I'm not quite sure." And little Rose looked thoughtfully up to the pretty stars.

"Shall I tell you what I think?" she asked presently.

Willie said, "Yes."

"Well then, I think that God means to bring us into the sunshine soon. Mother will get well, and father will be a good man, and we shall all be happy."

"But I want to be happy now, and I'm miserable. Just as miserable as ever I can be."

"We must look at the bright side, Willie."

"There's no bright side to look at," he replied impatiently.

"Oh yes, there is! We've got a nice comfortable home, and plenty of food to eat, and lots of nice clothes to wear, and mother isn't so bad but that she'll get better. Why there's a beautiful bright side."

Two hours afterwards, when Willie lay asleep in his own bed and father was in his room with the door shut, little Rose had to fight hard with the sorrows of her heart. She knelt down to pray before undressing; but as soon as her face was hidden the tears came springing into her eyes. She sobbed for a long time. Not a single word came to

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her lips for a while, but at last one cry rose from her little heavy-laden heart: "O Jesus, Thou knowest!" What a short prayer! Yet how dear it must have been to the gentle Saviour. He knew all about it, knew how the tears and sobs choked up her words, and how her heart throbbed and throbbed as if it would burst,—*He knew.*

And tenderly, oh! so tenderly, He watched over little Rose all night, and gave her a sweet, deep sleep to refresh her and fit her for the duties of the morrow.

Oh, how I wish all who read these pages would take their troubles to Jesus!

He knows all about each one, and He is always ready to hear the prayers which are offered in earnest and simple faith. Do take your sorrows, whether little or great, to Him. He can and *will* help you to bear them.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE VISIT TO LIVERPOOL.

THE next week passed away very slowly.

Rose had much to contend with. Her father was dull and heavy-hearted, Willie was often careless, and still oftener mischievous, and these things, with the care of the house and the sorrow she felt on account of her mother's suffering, formed a heavy burden for her, so heavy that she could not bear it all herself.

You know where she took this burden?

Not to Willie;—he was too young to realize the weight of it: not to her father;—he had burdens of his own, and, judging from his face, he was feeling them press heavily upon him at that time; but to JESUS. When Rose was only eight years old she had learnt to love the Saviour.

I do not mean to say that she was never naughty after that. She had angry tempers and wicked thoughts to fight against just the same as other children.

But since that time she had tried with all her might to do as Jesus would have her.

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Once during the week of which I am now telling you she got very cross with Willie. He had started off neat and tidy in good time for school, and she had no idea but that he was there busy with his lessons, until he came sobbing home at half-past ten o'clock.

He was covered from head to foot with black mud, and, as soon as Rose caught sight of him, she told him sharply that he deserved to be whipped soundly and sent to bed for the rest of the day.

He had been enticed by some idle boys to go out with them into the country instead of making haste to school. They had intended to have a couple of hours' fishing; but their enjoyment had been brought to a sudden end by Willie's losing his footing and falling head foremost into the river.

He sank deep into the slimy mud, and, had it not been for a man who happened to be near, would probably have been drowned.

All this he told Rose in a very sorrowful tone, and ended by begging her to bring down his best clothes and wash the dirty ones before father came home.

Her heart was soon softened towards him. She took off the muddy garments, washed and dressed him again, and then set to work to light the copper fire so as to get plenty of hot water.

It seemed that the clothes *wouldn't* get clean. She

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rubbed them until the skin came off her fingers and wrists. Then the continual smarting teased her until she sat down quite despairingly and began to cry. After soaking her pocket-handkerchief in tears she made another attempt to cleanse the soiled garments, and this time with better success.

Willie, meanwhile, felt thoroughly ashamed of himself, and repeatedly assured her that he'd never play truant again,—no, never.

One thing, however, comforted her very much during this sad week, and that was the fact that her father kept away from the public-house.

I cannot tell you how often and how earnestly Rose prayed for this. She knew very well that drink had caused much evil in her home. She knew that its influence had cast a dark, dark shadow over her mother's heart. She knew that it had robbed them of many comforts. She never swept and dusted the parlour without remembering the pretty cottage piano which used to stand against the wall, and which her mother used to teach her to play. It had been sold about twelve months before to pay the rent, because the landlord wouldn't wait any longer, and father had been spending a great part of his earnings at the "Golden Lion." No wonder then that Rose prayed for her father!

But I must hasten on with my story.

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When Mr. Ellis was drinking his second cup of tea on the Thursday after the accident he made both Rose and Willie start with surprise.

"I'm going to see mother on Saturday," he remarked, stirring his tea for the fourth time and looking at the children.

"Oh! father will you—?"—Rose stopped abruptly.

"Will I what?"

"Will you take me with you? I *do* want to see her."

Father looked grave. He was evidently counting the cost.

"Perhaps I will," he answered at length.

"And me too, father? I can't stay here alone, and I want to see mother as much as anybody," pleaded Willie.

"You want to tell her what a good boy you've been, eh!—keeping out of muddy rivers and all that sort of thing."

Willie's face grew remarkably long; but Rose's quick eyes soon discovered that father was only teasing him. It was soon settled, and from then till the time of starting the children talked of little else than the coming treat.

I cannot stay to tell you about the journey. It was a short one, but Rose was impatient to get to the hospital, and wished it over long before it was. When at last they saw their mother, and found that her leg was doing well and that she was quite bright and cheerful, they were overjoyed.

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"I want to be alone with father a little while, Rose," she said presently, and, putting the two children in charge of the nurse, who led them away, Mrs. Ellis began talking to her husband.

"George," she said gently, "if you only knew how I've thought of you since I've been lying here."

"I know, wife, I know," he replied.

"You won't be angry with me for anything I ask, dear? Have you kept away from—?"

"Don't ask!" he interposed hastily. "I am weak. They lured me in."

A deep shadow stole over her eyes.

"How often, husband?"

"Once; only once. The child came for me, and I hadn't the courage to go home with her."

"George, my dear, dear husband, I am powerless to help you. I can only lie here and think how I love you and our children. Oh, how happy you could make me!"

"By being an abstainer? I wouldn't confess it to any one else, Kate, but I *cannot* abstain. It has too much power over me. I long for it so much, and it satisfies my craving."

She took his hand and stroked it lovingly.

"You must begin in the right way, George. Your strength may fail, but God's can never fail; and this strength will be yours if you ask earnestly for it. Will

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you turn over a new leaf from to-day, and begin to serve God and fight against your love of drink? It would make me so happy,—oh, so happy!"

"I'll think over it, Kate."

"Think over it and pray over it. What has the drink done for us, George? It has robbed our home and our children. It has embittered my life. It has done you no good, and, more than this, it will do you *harm;* it will get more and more your master, it will drag you down, down, down so low. Think about it, pray about it."

His eyes were glistening and he could not trust himself to speak. There was something in those beautiful, tear-dimmed eyes and in that pleading face which sank deep into his heart and made him feel unhappy.

Rose was delighted to get a few minutes alone with her mother. She had so much to tell her. Sarah Brown's story was repeated, and the whole fortnight's adventures gone through. Her mother intrusted with her several messages for Sarah, kissed her, praised her, and called her her comfort, and, altogether, Rose felt that it was worth all the work and anxiety of the past to feel that she had been such a help to her mother.

Willie, too, got his share of loving words and kisses, and then the good-byes had to be said, and the three started for the railway-station.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAWN OF BRIGHTER DAYS.

THE next day was Sunday. Mr. Ellis was very thoughtful all day, and Rose and Willie could not help wondering what he was thinking about.

They went to Sunday-school as usual, leaving him at home, for I am sorry to say that he had for several years neglected the house of God.

After tea, just as Rose was going to bring out the big illustrated Bible, he laid his hand on her shoulder, and said, kindly, "I'm going to the meeting in the Mission Hall. Would you like to go too?"

"Oh yes, father, please. We'll be ready just in a minute," answered Rose.

Soon they started off together, and reached the Hall in good time. Just before the minister began to preach a tall, thin figure glided in at the door and seated itself in the most shadowy corner.—It was Sarah Brown. She had watched the three go in, and, almost unconsciously, had

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followed them, her greatest desire being to catch another glimpse of "Kate's child," for she had not seen Rose to speak to her since the evening on which they parted with a kiss.

The hymn was sung, the lesson read, and a short prayer offered. Then the minister gave out his text,—"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

His clear voice reached the farthest corner of the hall, and before he had finished the text all eyes were fixed on him.

His heart was so full of love for Jesus that he could not keep his joy to himself. Oh, how he talked of Him! How he pictured Him standing knocking at the door of the heart, pleading so tenderly to be let in! How he entreated them not to turn Him away! Presently he paused. Mr. Ellis leaned forward to catch his next word, and Sarah, from her dusky corner, leaned forward too, and fixed her eyes upon him.

Then, in a voice which thrilled each one, he repeated the verse—

"Knocking, knocking, ever knocking?
What! Still there?
Oh! sweet soul, but once behold Him
With the glory-crowned hair;

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And those eyes, so strange and tender,
Waiting there;
Open! open! once behold Him,—
Him so fair."

"Will you, *can* you turn Him away?" he asked, as he closed the Bible. "If you knew how He loves you, loves the most wicked one among you,—if you knew how His gentle heart yearns over you, I am sure you would take Him in at once. Oh, do not go out of this room to-night with the door of your hearts barred against Jesus! Let Him in, and you will never never want to let Him out again."

After the closing prayer he begged those who had not yet opened their hearts to Jesus to stay behind, and take Him in before they went away.

Mr. Ellis rose as if to go, but Rose took his hand.

"Father dear, stay, do stay," she pleaded.

For a minute a fierce struggle raged in his bosom.

Satan whispered, "Go home, and don't make a stupid of yourself; people will laugh at you;"—Rose clasped his hand and prayed silently for him;—in one of the white beds in the Liverpool hospital his own wife was praying for him. For a minute he stood hesitatingly, then sank down on his knees with a heavy sigh.

Oh, there was joy in heaven that night!

Fourteen people stayed behind in that Mission Hall, besides the Christians, who waited to pray with them and

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try to help them to accept Jesus. And among the fourteen there were two whom we know quite well,—Sarah Brown and Mr. Ellis.

The Wicked One did not want to let them go. He put everything in their way which he could possibly devise just then; but though he is strong Jesus is stronger, and Jesus broke the chains that had been binding them. He gave them power to open the door of their hearts and let Him in.

"Father," said Rose, after they reached home, "you'll never drink any more now? I mean you won't drink intoxicating liquors?" His face, which had been very bright, grew almost sad. There was evidently another struggle going on.

She twined her arms around his neck and kissed him again and again.

"Promise, father dear. Promise God now, oh! please, please do."

Presently he spoke: "I must make quite a new start. Yes I *must*. 'Tis no use going at things by halves. God helping me I'll turn right round and set my face towards heaven; and I'll never drink another drop of intoxicating liquor again, so help me God."

Rose's face was hidden on his shoulder. She wept freely; such happiness was in her heart that she could find no other vent for her feelings.

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She could not sleep that night. She lay still for nearly two hours thinking of all that had happened. Then she got out of bed and went to the window to look out.

The stars were shining most beautifully; here and there a tiny white cloud was being wafted along over the deep azure; and Rose thought that the stars were like angel's eyes, so softly bright, and the pure white clouds she imagined to be like the angels' snowy wings.

On the Monday afternoon when she was about to sit down to mend half-a-dozen pairs of socks she heard a knock at the door. Upon opening it she found Sarah Brown, dressed much more tidily than usual, but looking downcast.

Rose made her come in and sit down.

"Oh, child!" began Sarah, "I was forced to come, or else go to the public. 'Tis a hard fight. I must give in. I can't put aside the temptation."

"Is it the drink that tempts you so?" asked Rose half-timidly.

"Ay, lass, 'tis that and nothing else. It's been my ruin all through life. I and my husband would have got on very well if we'd had nothin' to do with it. My little baby 'ud have lived if I'd kept away from it; and I shouldn't have been such a bad woman if I'd never tasted it."

Rose did her best to comfort her, then she gave her her mother's messages: "I was to be sure and tell you that

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mother has never forgot you, and to say she begs you to turn round and lead a new life. She would be so glad to help you get an honest living, if you'd give up drinking and be good."

Just before tea-time Sarah rose to go. "I'm cheerier now," she said. "You'll pray for me often?"

Rose promised and then kissed her.

Sarah looked straight in her face. "Shall I tell you, child?" she said kindly, "the kiss you gave me that other time kept me out of the public-house for a day."

Rose looked surprised. "I didn't know my kisses were so strong," she replied with a smile. "See now, I'll give you one on each cheek, and let these keep you out of the public-house for ever."

"God bless the child," said Sarah, as she turned away at last. "She's most like an angel to me. God bless her."

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CHAPTER IX.

A LAST PEEP AT OUR OLD FRIENDS.

AND now I must pass over a few weeks and hasten to the conclusion of my story.

There was a great stir in Rose's home one Wednesday afternoon. The parlour fire was lit, the best tea things were set out, and Rose was flitting merrily about the room, looking as happy as a little girl could look.

Willie had his nose pressed flat against the window, and was trying hard to look to the corner of the street.

On the sofa sat Sarah Brown, attired in a black alpaca dress for which she had been working hard for three weeks. She was busily knitting at the stocking with which Rose had been engaged on the evening when Mr. Ellis was telling his stories of bygone years.

Sarah looked very different from what she had done when Rose first saw her in the public-house. The fierce, wild glare had entirely disappeared from her eyes, and there was a pleasant smile on her thin face.

In a few minutes a cab stopped at the door, and Mr.

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Ellis jumped out briskly and helped his wife into the house.

What a happy evening that was!

I am sure I cannot tell you who enjoyed it most.

Mr. Ellis had never looked so happy before. His face was perfectly radiant as he told his wife all about the service in the Mission Hall, and how Rose had begged him to stay behind.

Then Sarah began to tell how the child had helped her to overcome her evil habits.

"Rose, darling, come here," said her mother, turning towards the window where Rose had been standing a few minutes previously.

But she was not there. She had stolen away to her own bed-room; and there she was trying to thank God for all the joy which He had given her.

Willie went in search of her, and when at last she was found and brought into the parlour her mother held out her arms towards her and Rose was quickly folded in them.

"God has blessed you very much, Rosie," said Mrs. Ellis, tenderly stroking the brown curls. "You must give Him all the praise."

"Mother," she whispered, so softly that no one else could hear, "I haven't been so good as you think. I only tried my best to fill your place. I was real naughty and cross sometimes."

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Mrs. Ellis only drew her closer and smiled.

"Husband," she said presently, "I have thought much of Sarah during the last fortnight. What shall we do for her?"

Sarah interposed. "Don't think o' me. I'm strong yet, and I'll make an honest living by some means. I can wash and cook and clean, as well as I could in the old days when you was a child."

"But you must have a start, Sarah," said Mrs. Ellis.

"Yes, yes, to be sure. You *must* have a start," echoed her husband.

"I've been thinking of a plan," continued Rose's mother, "Maggie's very weakly yet and won't be about for some months, and her husband is looking out for some one to see after the housework and attend to her while she is so poorly. How would that place suit you, Sarah?"

"'Tis more than ever I dared hope for," replied Sarah trying to force back the tears which threatened to choke her voice. "To think as I've been running contrary to the Lord's wishes all my life, and now He's forgiven me everything and is opening up my way. I couldn't be happier nowheres than with Maggie, away from this town where I've seen so many miserable days."

"Then it is settled," said Mrs. Ellis. "I spoke to Maggie and her husband about it before I left Liverpool, and they are both delighted."

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"Oh, isn't it the very thing for Sarah!" exclaimed Rose, whose face was flushed with pleasure.

"'Tis just the very place she'll suit," put in Mr. Ellis. "Kate, you're the cleverest little thinker I ever met."

After a little while Mr. Ellis read a chapter in the Bible and prayed. Then they parted for the night.

. . . . . .

Before many months had passed away there was a new piano in the parlour.

Rose soon learned to play it, and often on the long winter evenings the happy little group would gather in the cosy room and have music and singing.

Mr. Ellis kept true to his promise and never tasted any intoxicating drink; and thus the dark cloud which had so long rested over the family was swept away.

Aunt Maggie never got well. She lingered on for three years, and Sarah tended her faithfully to the last. She resolutely fought against her old temptation, the drink, and lived a happy and useful life.

How many of my readers will follow Rose's example, and try to help those around them to give up the drinking habits which are working so much ruin and desolation in our land?

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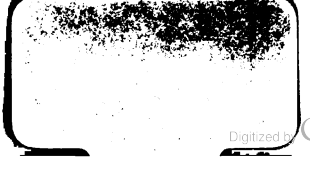
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